

The rural panopticon

Chris Philo^{a,*}, Hester Parr^a, Nicola Burns^b

^a School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK

^b Lancaster Medical School, Faculty of Health and Medicine, Lancaster University, LA1 4YG, England, UK



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ABSTRACT

As a contribution to both rural theory and a geography of rural disability, this paper tackles the idea of the 'rural panopticon'. Inspired by empirical research on mental ill-health in the Scottish Highlands, the authors specify certain workings of the rural panopticon, stressing interconnections between visibility, observation, surveillance, chatter and interiorised senses of self-disciplining (particularly for those with fragile mental health). There are suggestions that Bentham regarded his institutional brain-child, the Panopticon, as most logically and properly an urban phenomena, even calling it 'Panopticon Town', but there is a supplementary argument that identifies a rural vision – of a virtuous, self-regulating farming community – present in the margins of his Panopticon thinking. Through the figure of the 'glass palace' in the countryside, emphasising the pervasive watching, judging and censuring of conduct, a further link is made from Bentham's Panopticon to the rural panopticon. The paper explores this link both textually and through the Highlands case study, concluding by examining Foucault's dual attention to both Bentham's Panopticon and a rural colony for delinquent boys, Mettray, as twin exemplars of 'panopticism' in the disciplining of troublesome and troubled populations (those with disabilities included).

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1. Introduction

In 1841, the British illustrator A.W.N. Pugin published contrasted 'views' of workhouses 'ancient and modern', one of which (Fig. 1) depicted the possible appearance of a workhouse built according to Sampson Kempthorne's 'Hexagon Plan of a Workhouse', as endorsed by the English Poor Law Commissioners. 'Pugin portrayed the 'modern poorhouse' as a prison-like Panopticon' (Driver, 1993a: 61), the latter forever associated with the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his design for a so-called 'ideal prison-house'. As Qing (2008: 143) explains, 'Kempthorne's design revised Bentham's original idea, with the governor's daily presence at the centre of the hub, enhancing surveillance.' Pugin's sketch of this workhouse included rustic surroundings, with trees, fields and a neighbouring parish church all faintly visible, thereby suggesting the presence of a Panopticon-like structure in the countryside. Such an equation of Panopticon¹ and countryside is unusual, however, in that the more

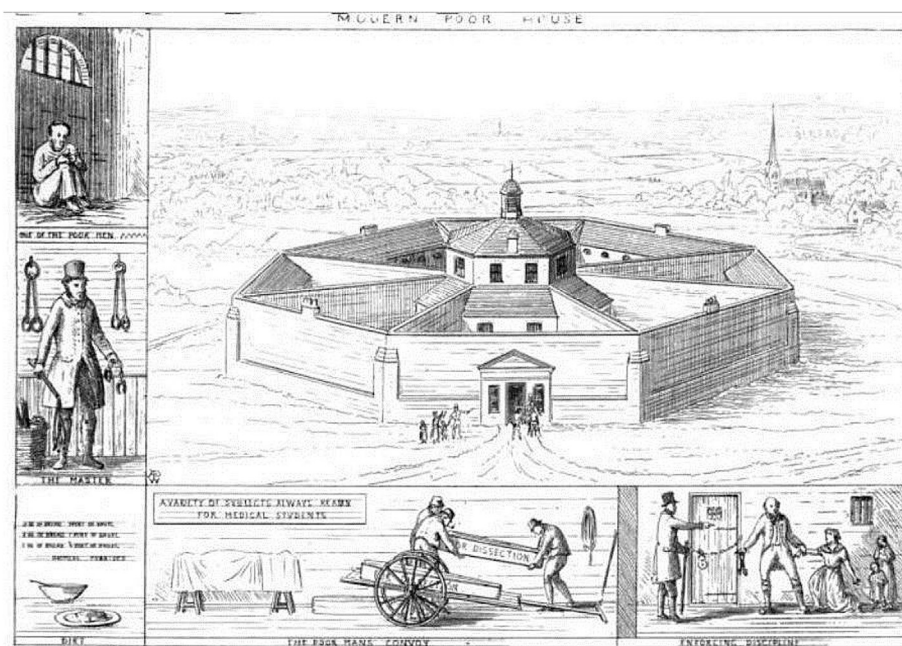
natural habitat for institutions envisaged along such lines has been the city or at least built-up urban neighbourhoods. Neither Bentham's own writings nor academic texts discussing his Panopticon foreground the issue of *where* exactly Panopticons might be located, but there are some fragmentary indications that the city is logically and properly where they would be found. Nonetheless, a closer look at Bentham's ideas indicates that aspects of the rural, and specifically idealised ways in which rural social life might be conducted, were significant influences on his underlying grasp of what the Panopticon should be and achieve. Moreover, an argument can be made that a sense of the countryside as an intimately surveilled locale, one full of individuals constantly watching, judging and possibly chattering about each other, did indeed have a bearing on Bentham's Panopticon plan.

Such matters are explored in the sections comprising the first half of this paper, attending to connective sinews between rurality and Bentham's Panopticon that have evaded detection to date in the rural geography/studies literature. The second half of the paper then switches to reporting from a substantive research project concerning the experiences of people with mental health problems living in remote rural areas of Highland Scotland. A key finding from this research has been that such people often feel themselves to be constantly under surveillance from their neighbours, and more broadly by the local rural communities in which they dwell. Potentially positive dimensions to this surveillance are sometimes

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Christopher.Phil@glasgow.ac.uk (C. Philo).

¹ We use 'Panopticon(s)', with an upper-case 'P', to denote Bentham's institutional vision, meaning his ideal plan, further iterations and his attempts to have Panopticon institutions actually built. We use 'panopticon(s)' with a lower-case 'p' to denote instantiations of Foucault's more dispersed 'panopticism', including our own specification of the 'rural panopticon'. We have adjusted a few quotations from other authors/sources to be consistent with this approach to using an upper-case 'P' for Bentham's 'Panopticon'.



acknowledged, ones reflecting local people taking care of and responsibility for 'their own', but it can evidently also become a potent source of heightened anxiety for the people affected and a negative pressure on their already fragile mental health. Ironically, features of rural social life that Bentham valued – even bringing them into the Panopticon, if in distorted form – were often perceived by our participants 'from below' as problematic; as a drag on more healthy everyday geographies of rural mental disability. It was during this project that the research team began to conceive of a 'rural panopticon', an unexpected presence of, if not Bentham's Panopticon itself, then what Foucault (1977, esp. Chap. 3:3) terms a more dispersed 'panopticism' insinuating itself through a multitude of modern social spaces. The task of the present paper is hence an unusual one, pivoting between an exegetical account of a latent ruralism underpinning the Panopticon, on the one hand, and a sustained inquiry into a (real and imagined) panopticism permeating the lives of rural dwellers with mental disabilities, on the other.

termed rural disability geography is deliberately light, since this important contextual work is undertaken in the editorial introduction (Pini et al., 2017) to the theme issue containing our paper.

It is assumed that readers will know something about Bentham (1748–1832) and his design, ‘The Panopticon’, for what he regarded as an ideal prison or other reformatory/welfare institution energised by the *positive* ambition of mending the minds, bodies and conducts of disparate ‘problem’ populations (eg. Bender, 1987; Brunon-Ernst, 2012; Himmelfarb, 1968; Semple, 1992). To quote just one evocation of Bentham’s Panopticon from many available in the geographical literature (also Driver, 1985, 1993b; Hannah, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Philo, 2001a,b):

First mooted in a letter from Russia of 1787, Bentham insisted that the Panopticon design could be appropriate for any large built institution whose residents 'are meant to be kept under inspection', whether prisons, 'or penitentiary-houses, or houses of correction, or workhouses, or manufactories, or mad-houses, or hospital, or

schools' (in Bowring, 1843: 40). People with mental disabilities and physical ailments of all kinds were hence conceived, from the start, as legitimate objects of Panopticon principles.

Bentham was determined that Panopticons be built, to which end he persuaded the British government that he should be the person to deliver on the 1779 Penitentiary Act, committing the authorities to the creation of a National Penitentiary (with rehabilitative ambitions). Following many years of negotiation and intrigue – including a hiatus 1801–1811 and significant financial outlay by Bentham himself – he realised that a Panopticon Penitentiary would never be built, resigning himself instead to seeking compensation for previous losses. In practice, few institutions, in Britain or elsewhere, came to emulate at all closely the Panopticon design, doubtless because of technical construction difficulties and associated high costs, but also because other architectural blueprints began to circulate (even if borrowing from Bentham's plans). In the prison field, the likes of Joshua Jebb's Pentonville (built 1840–1842), itself aping William Black's less-remembered Liverpool Borough Gaol (built 1785–1789), superficially resembled Bentham's Panopticon, but with a radial geometry offering 'not a surveillance of the inmates ...; it was surveillance of the silent space that separated them' (Evans, 1982: 4). The reference to 'silent space' is also a nod to the so-called 'silent system', seen by some as an alternative to the 'separate system' of keeping inmates spatially apart, the latter of which had Bentham as but one of its originating influences (Ogborne, 1995). In the asylum field, meanwhile, it was not the Panopticon but rather the 'moral architecture' of Old William Tuke's York Retreat, itself very much a rural rather than urban foundation (Philo, 2004, Chap. 6), which most captivated early-nineteenth century lunacy reform. Subsequent developments in this field then drew upon a diversity of proposals, for 'block', 'pavilion' and even 'cottage asylums', none of which resembled the Panopticon even as they exhibited an abiding concern for surveillance and spatial arrangements (Philo, 1989).

There is little in Bentham's own writings about *where* he thought Panopticons should best be found, although in personal notes he occasionally wrote of 'Panopticon Town', supposing his institutional brain-child to be sited in a wider built-up neighbourhood with roads and public life all orchestrated by him as 'town planner' (Semple, 1993: 235). Further hints can be gleaned from the locational history of the abortive Panopticon Penitentiary. Initially, Bentham hoped to purchase a site at Battersea Rise, 'within easy reach of London', 'a pleasant and salubrious neighbourhood; and for these reasons he wanted to build his ... prison there, especially as it was near the metropolis, the great Seat of Inspection' (Semple, 1993: 170). Eventual failure to secure this site led to an alternative target:

In July 1796 Bentham informed [an acquaintance] of a discovery he had made of a tract of land along the river upstream of Woolwich Dock Yard, bounded on the south by the London to Woolwich road. This land, belonging to the Bowater family, was available, but Bentham wanted to erect the actual Panopticon building south of the road on a hill covered with ancient woodland, called Hanging Wood. For Bentham, the site had every advantage except that it was rather far from London, the great Seat of Inspection, and certainly considerably further than Battersea Rise. (Semple, 1993: 195)

It is telling that Bentham harboured doubts about the Hanging Wood site being too distant from the capital city, veering too far into the rural-suburban acres beyond easy urban reach. The Hanging Wood site was indeed relatively rural, clothed in 'ancient woodland', even if the latter was somewhat decayed with trees

uprooted and sand extracted, but neighbouring powerful homeowners, the Spencer Wilsons, were hostile to a sale. They enjoyed the aesthetics of their local environment, the wood containing Lady Wilson's 'favourite walk', and this early instance of NIMBYism against a 'public facility' forced Bentham to look back towards the grimy capital. Thus:

He decided to abandon the search in salubrious suburban areas and took himself to Tothill Fields, an area of waste only yards from Westminster with easy access to the river; an area of vile mean streets and marshy unproductive land, notorious as a resort for thieves and vagabonds, squalid with festering rubbish. Surely here the Panopticon could be built without antagonising the neighbourhood. (Semple, 1993: 197)

The implication is that – while he entertained sites boasting rural characteristics for a Panopticon, seeking 'salubrious' environs² and not necessarily the more debased of urban settings³ – there was still an underlying spatial logic for Bentham about Panopticons working best when located close to the 'great Seat of Inspection' (meaning London, the dominant urban centre of political life and public oversight in nineteenth-century Britain).

3. Bentham and the 'glass palace' in the countryside

Perhaps surprisingly, though, there is another argument to be made about the relationships between Bentham, the Panopticon and rurality. In a 1791 postscript to the original Panopticon 'letters', Bentham criticised most 'manufactories', which commonly collected 'numbers [of workers] under a common roof,' for tending 'to be nurseries of vice':

[T]he only manufactories favourable to virtue are the dispersed, the *rural* manufactories, those which spread themselves over the face of a country, and are carried on in private families by each man within the circle of his little family in the bosom of innocence and retirement. ... Is there anything in the air of the country or in the structure of a cottage that renders it inaccessible to vice? (Bentham, 1791: 222, original emphasis)

Bentham's answer to the latter question was 'no', there was nothing *essential* about the countryside to render it vice-less, but a principle of 'dispersal' – of breaking up large collectivities which breed vice – should be translated into the Panopticon. The individualised compartments of his ideal prison-house were hence the solution, inspired in small measure by his observations about the dispersed geography of rural manufactories.

The vision of a virtuous countryside – 'innocent' and 'retired', distant from urban-industrial hubbub – is seen by some Bentham commentators as an influence upon his broader thinking. Semple pursues this theme, having explored strains of utopian thinking in Bentham's *oeuvre*:

The Panopticon therefore closely resembles the two classic utopias in English literature [More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*]. It is also deeply imbued with the Arcadian tradition. Bentham is not usually portrayed as a sentimental romantic; but

² A hint that Panopticons might also have a rural character is given in Semple's claim that '[t]he Panopticon would also have been a farm. Potatoes, vegetables, fruits and flowers were to be grown, and pigs were to be reared' (Semple, 1993: 235). That said, this was an era when urban agriculture and horticulture were still widespread.

³ 'From one of the *pleasantest*, I descend at once to one of the *vilest*. I can descend no lower' (in Semple, 1993: 197), remarked Bentham in contrasting (rural-suburban) Hanging Wood with (deep-urban) Tothill Fields.

he does seem to have shared some of its assumptions and pre-conceptions. (Semple, 1993: 304)⁴

Bentham likely did not agree fully with the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) that ‘cities were ‘the abyss of the human species’’ (Semple, 1993: 304–205), but Qing (2008, Chap. 6) has drawn parallels between Rousseau’s theory of education and Bentham’s ideas about educating children in the (pauper) Panopticon. Rousseau’s well-known evocation of Emile, the boy sent for his education to the countryside,⁵ is taken by Qing (2008: 229) as a point of contact with Bentham, who:

... shares with Rousseau’s theory the character of a purified world for children. For Emile, the purified world is the countryside residence, and for Bentham’s children it is the Panopticon poorhouse.

Where they differed was that, for Rousseau, rural nature would spontaneously lead the child to virtue and wisdom, whereas for Bentham it would be his carefully-formulated plans.

Semple proposes that Bentham was also influenced by a poetic novel authored, initially anonymously in 1699, by a French archbishop, Francois Fénelon (1651–1715), entitled (in English translation) *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a ‘romance’ that Bentham identified as ‘the foundation-stone of my whole character; the starting-post from whence my career of life commenced’ (in Semple, 1993: 304). Book XXII of this work told of the love felt by Telemachus, son of Ulysses, for Antiope, the daughter of Idomeneus, a wise ruler who did not worry about his ‘glorious towns’, but rather concentrated on governing over a ‘prosperous countryside’ and avoiding any ‘royal vice’ which could spread like a ‘contagion’ to the villages (in Hawkesworth, 1847: 385–387).⁶ Upon arriving in the main ‘city’ of the region, Salentum (Fig. 2), Telemachus was ‘greatly surprised to find all the neighbourhood cultivated like a garden’ and also ‘so little magnificence in the city’ (in Chilton, 1997: 266). His love for Antiope, meanwhile, reflected ‘not the tumultuous desire of passion’, but rather ‘the calm complacency of reason,’ spurred by the ‘glowing modesty of her countenance; her silent diffidence and sweet reserve; her constant attention to tapestry, embroidering, or some other useful and elegant employment’ (in Hawkesworth, 1847: 395). Since her mother’s death, she had impressed all with ‘her diligence in the management of her father’s household’ (in Hawkesworth, 1847: 395), and it is easy to see in her reasoned, productive demeanour a role-model for Bentham when envisaging his ideal Panopticon resident. Fénelon had authored another tract in 1667, *Traité de l’éducation des filles*, urging ‘noblewomen’ to forsake ‘court life’, ‘the salon’ and ‘polite society’ in favour of returning as ‘wives and mothers’ to ‘the home’ and ‘domestic sphere’ (Martin, 2011: 109; also Hayes, 1996: 63). This tract fed into a ‘public campaign, led by ... Rousseau, to encourage

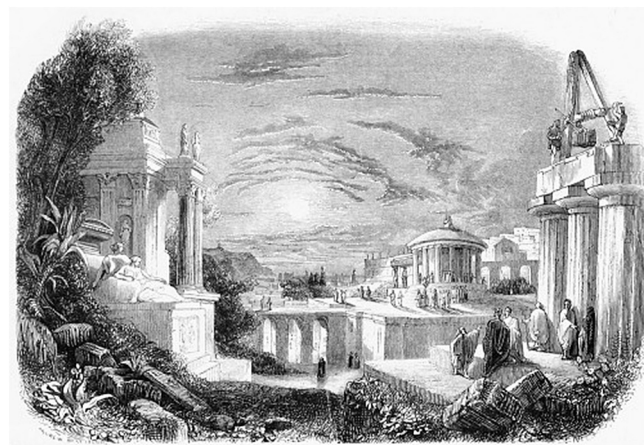


Fig. 2. ‘View of the city of Salente [Salentum]’, showing the rural setting of the city, from an illustration in a French edition of Fénelon’s *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1840). Source: <http://scrap.oldbookillustrations.com/post/1445387518/johannot-city-salente>, accessed 20/08/15

aristocratic women to cleanse themselves of the impurities and wanton values of the city by returning to their country estates’ (Martin, 201: 5). Thus, Antiope, ‘the female agent of [her father’s] revitalising scheme’ (Martin, 2011: 109), busying herself with the affairs of his country estate, was exemplary.⁷

Antiope exerted benign power over the surrounding rural lands, and the *Telemachus* story tells of her controlling ‘gaze’ – ‘a glance of her eye is a sufficient command’ (in Hawkesworth, 1847: 397) – and conjures an image of Antiope’s gaze radiating out from her father’s country house into the surrounding farmland. Yet, Antiope was herself evidently being gazed upon, minutely observed by Telemachus, who ‘in conversation ... discusses the accomplishments of his love’ (Hayes, 1996: 62). More widely, by the logic of Rousseau’s public campaign, Antiope and her ‘sisters’ should be subjected to the most intense vigilance, to monitor and check their conduct; and ‘they could also, Fénelon claimed, learn to be good by watching one another’.⁸ Combining these elements, and returning to Bentham, Semple (1993: 304) concludes:

Fénelon’s heroine [Antiope] in her glass palace was the archetype of the Panopticon. Fénelon’s ideal society was a pastoral Arcadia where shepherds and shepherdesses live in small family groups under the benevolent rule of a Foster-King. They were sequestered from the evils of luxury, envy and violence. The idea of innocence protected from urban corruption is the very stuff of the pastoral idyll.

Antiope’s ‘glass palace’ in the countryside can hence be figured as akin to – as an originary inspiration for – Bentham’s Panopticon, partly because of that Rousseau-ian rural ‘purifying’ role described by Qing (2008), but also because of the emphasis on ‘the gaze’: on inspecting, on everyone watching everyone else, on judgement, remark and (implied) censure. The figure of the ‘glass palace’

⁴ Semple (1993: 282 and 297–298) debates the extent to which beneath the exterior of Bentham as calculating rationalist philosopher – obsessed with systems and mechanisms; with ‘mundane details’ over being ‘visionary’ – there were still traces of the romantic, the sentimentalist, for whom rural ‘arcadia’ held a lingering appeal. She still adds, comparing Bentham with Robert Owen residing in his rural model community at New Lanark, that the former’s ‘cooler enthusiasms allowed him to remain in comfortable seclusion in London’ (Semple, 1993: 307).

⁵ In his own *Confessions*, it becomes clear that Rousseau – an Enlightenment thinker with clear romanticist leanings – drew upon his own childhood experiences of living/learning away from Paris, enjoying the more ‘natural/healthy’ environment away from the ‘ills of the city’ (eg. Gianoutsos, 2006).

⁶ There have been various translations of this poetic epic: Hawkesworth’s of 1768 is used here (in an 1847 reprint) alongside Chilton’s 1997 edition of Smollett’s of 1776. The example of how corruption in Salentum, the city, had been overcome by Idomeneus indexed ‘a lazy discontented people transformed into innocent agrarian families’ (in Chilton, 1997: xxiii).

⁷ A feminist geography ‘gender of space’ (McDowell, 1983) critique of this campaign, and specifically of Fénelon’s tract, can readily be envisaged.

⁸ ‘[A]n idea that influenced Maintenon’s establishment of an all-girl’s boarding school at Siant-Cyr near Versailles in 1686. ... [It] was reserved for impoverished daughters of the ancient nobility, who were taught there to become effective estate managers, just as Fénelon, one of the school’s confessors, had recommended’ (Martin, 2011: 109–110). Maintenon made Fénelon’s tract the school’s official textbook.

captures this double-sense of Arcadian purity and the constant 'looking in/on' seemingly typical of intimate rural *Gemeinschaft* settings: it squares perfectly with the rural panopticon as we find it in our empirical research, to be reported shortly. Arguably, though, the rural panopticon was always there, flickering in Bentham's hopes for 'Panopticon Town', even if largely shorn of its most obvious rustic associations.

4. The rural panopticon in the Scottish Highlands countryside: a case study

The materials below are drawn from an ESRC-funded study on rural mental health in the Scottish Highlands,⁹ which tackled the experience of mental health service users, carers and workers in one (relatively) urban and three rural localities: namely Inverness¹⁰ and district (henceforth INV), Easter Ross (ER), North West Sutherland (NWS), and Skye and Lochalsh (SL). Different degrees of rurality are displayed by the latter three localities, with NWS arguably being the most remote from centres of population and service provision. We undertook 107 in-depth semi-structured interviews with users of psychiatric services, organised through both voluntary and statutory sector contacts, as well as focus group discussions usually based in local 'drop-ins'. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with the use of outline schedules, being taped when permitted, and all transcripts were coded using the NVivo software package; and the project has been written up in a series of published papers (esp. Philo et al., 2003a,b, 2004; also Boyd and Parr, 2008).¹¹ The research itself is now over a decade old, but the substantive materials retain their power to illuminate the presence, and effects, of a rural panopticon for our participants.¹² In what follows, we loosely track a logical progression through matters of: visibility, observation and surveillance; 'reading' situations and states; gossip and disclosure; unwellness and sites of revelation; evasion and passing; and broader mental health consequences.

4.1. 'The valley of the twitching curtains'

In small rural communities it is difficult to keep secrets; and not only is it difficult to keep secrets, it is difficult to keep any part of one's life private. There is a palpable sense in which all community members are enmeshed in the lives of each other, partly by their exposure to the detailed routines of other people's everyday existence. This is especially the case for remote Highland communities in which few houses are dotted about barren and treeless physical landscapes: a movement, a flash of colour, the starting of a car, the sound of a telephone across the wind are extremely obvious in such locations (Fig. 3). Even in Highland villages and towns, crowded centres of population by comparison, visits to the only post office, walks down the lane or drunken exits from one of the few public houses are highly visible social actions. Interviewees discuss such everyday 'events' and routines as ones

consistently marked by friends, family and neighbours, and there is striking agreement that a fundamental part of their rural lives is the reality of observation: 'People see me walking' [Paul, SL, 10/9/01]; 'you are living under a microscope' [Clara, ER, 27/11/01]; 'it's very much like living in a goldfish bowl' [Stephanie, NWS, 17/7/01]; 'it doesn't matter what I do somebody sees me!' [Ralph, SL, 18/9/01].¹³ There exists a strong sense that lives are not entirely private here; that simply by living in rural spaces, like Antiope, they have more visible, more public, lives. An explanation is ventured for this heightened visibility: that, because places of low population density are strewn across natural landscapes and hold few centres of social interaction, they simply lend themselves to observations: 'because of the smallness and closeness of the community, people just can't avoid it' [Ken, SL, 19/9/01]. Observations may be unintentional, but can still become a source of knowledge about another, and the practice of observation easily slips into being more akin to surveillance: a watching with purpose, a looking with possible consequences.



Fig. 3. Remote West Highland landscape with figure.
(Source: authors' own research photograph archive)

One upshot is the diminution of anonymity, which becomes near impossible in a situation where observation so readily shades into surveillance and, in turn, seeds the formation of shared knowledges about everyone and everything local. Indeed, 'it's very difficult to be anonymous in a small place, I mean people are spread out, but people do know each other' [Katy, NWS, 9/7/01]; 'it's a small town and it's got a very village mentality, everyone knows everyone else's lives' [Miriam ER, 13/11/01]; 'everyone knows everyone' [Justine, INV, 14/6/01]. Family and friendship networks span square miles of these rural districts, joining together places sometimes separated by considerable distances across rough terrain, maybe stretches of water too: 'Everyone tends to know each other or they know someone connected to them you know' [Charmaine, ER, 22/11/01]; 'I can guarantee that folk in Kyleakin know what is going on in Mallaig and the island [Skye] as a whole. They know everything' [Geraldine, SL, 18/9/01]; 'You can't really do anything without everybody knowing. And they almost know before you've done it!' [Larissa, ER, 12/12/01].

Participants discuss in detail how their lives are 'revealed' in

⁹ Our project was *Social Geographies of Rural Mental Health: Experiencing Inclusion and Exclusion*, ESRC Award Ref. R000238453: with Chris Philo as PI, Hester Parr as Co-I and Nicola Burns as RA. For a study that, in various respects, up-dates our Highlands mental health research, see Daly (2014).

¹⁰ Inverness is now formally designated as the 'city' of the Highlands.

¹¹ We authored a number of 'findings papers', comprehensively documenting and to an extent interpreting our 'findings', and we have now archived these papers in the Glasgow University Library (GUL) ENLIGHTEN e-prints archive. Of special relevance here are findings papers on: inclusionary social relations (Philo et al., 2002a); exclusionary social relations (Philo et al., 2002b); and visibility and gossip (Parr et al., 2002).

¹² We have elected to write our account here in the *present* tense, notwithstanding that field research was undertaken in 2001.

¹³ Quotes from participants are italicised; all names are pseudonyms selected by the researchers; to be consistent with our reporting in other papers, we indicate the study locality and date of interview; where there might be sensitivity about a person, place or facility mentioned in a quote, the original text has been replaced with NAME.

rural landscapes and small communities:

You can't do anything, everybody knows what you're doing, and he [GP] said 'that's universal, it's the same [in] any close community, all you have to do is switch on the telly and watch Coronation Street!' [Julia, SL, 17/9/01]¹⁴

The claim that any close community involves similar levels of intimate surveillance is qualified by many of our interviewees, who frame the Highlands as affording a particular geography of visibility, notably when compared to larger urban centres. Felix [INV, 31/5/01] refers to the whole region as 'the valley of the twitching curtains', while others differentiate their visible rural Highland lives from city landscapes: 'Well in Inverness you are completely anonymous ... whereas in Mallaig ...' [Gordon, INV, 14/5/01]; 'In the city you can hide in the city, you can't hide in a close-knit community where everybody knows everything' [group discussion, ER, 23/11/01]; 'you can maintain an anonymity in the town and you can sort of go about the place privately ... where[as] up here everybody knows everybody' [Gill, SL, 15/9/01].

4.2. 'You can tell who is having an off day'

Repeated exposure to the mundane details of others' everyday lives and personalities in these rural places makes it possible for community members to make judgements about what might be 'normal' or 'routine' for a given individual, and to start drawing inferences accordingly. Thus, 'It's a place you can go in there and folk will read you, you often don't have to say anything' [Ken, SL, 19/9/01]; 'You would walk into the shop and people would spot that there was something wrong' [Rowland, NWS, 5/7/01]. Or, in a more sustained reflection:

Yes you can tell if someone is having an off day, aye. How can you describe it? You know what a person's character is like, so if one day you come across them and they are different, you think they are just having an off day, but if it was more than that ... There are certain people in the village you could say 'is so and so okay? He hasn't been very well and so on'. [Greg, INV, 18/6/01]

The contrast is explicitly drawn with the city: 'In a small community you see the same people more often than you would sort of living in a city or whatever ... If you're seeing people on a daily basis, you do notice changes' [Miriam, ER, 13/11/01]. For people with mental health problems who are dealing with or recovering from symptoms that may result in them being less socially competent than normal, there is a greater risk of their mental ill-health being noticed, interpreted and in effect disclosed. For some, their 'mistakes' in social spaces are commented upon after recovering from illness, as Sally [SL, 20/8/01] explains: 'I think it's my face, especially my face and [a local person] said 'it's great to see you going into your purse and you're not shaking''. Sally's 'shaking' had been previously witnessed and presumably assessed, maybe as signs of mental or neurological problems, and Sally wondered if other symptoms, such as a facial twitch, might also have been subject to observation and remark.

Intriguingly, one respondent contemplates the particularity of rural settings, as opposed to urban ones, regarding the specific textures of visibility that fuel how a place and its peoples are 'read':

It's easier to read everything when you're not in the city. Because in the city you have got everything coming at you, you've got

neon lights, you've got the noise of the cars, traffic lights, you've got the whole bloody city at you. That really doesn't leave lots of space in your mind for the little nuances of how a person is feeling. [Barry, SL, 18/9/01]

In this account, Barry proposes that there are too many disturbing sights and sounds in the city, a dizzying phenomenology of encounter, that arguably close down 'space in your mind' for a more subtle 'reading' of the 'little nuances' integral to what a person, wittingly or otherwise, is revealing about themselves. By inference, in a rural setting such a 'reading' is simpler, precisely because people do not have 'the whole bloody city' acting as a cover or shield: its chaos, hidey-holes and distractions are just not available. The 'glass palace' of rurality hence lends itself, not only to intimate surveillance, but also to the realm of interpretation: to the making of assumptions that may, or may not, be appropriate.

4.3. 'Terrible places for gossip'

Our study localities harbour a relentless up-scaling of observations, sometimes in a forensic manner akin to intelligence-gathering through ongoing (police) surveillance, which propagates stores of shared knowledge spreading widely around multiple community members. Just as Telemachus chattered incessantly about Antiope, knowledge creation and circulation here occur through the medium of community 'talk', or 'gossip', allowing intimately detailed observations pooled with others to extend the surveillant gaze. The result is a dispersed geography of 'local knowledge'¹⁵ over which the talked-about have little control, only a vague awareness that their behaviour might be observed and then rendered more visible by the sharing of those observations with others: 'people know your own business and it can be really awful you know. You get talked about so much you know?' [Julia, SL, 17/9/01].

There are significant nodes in this geography of local knowledge, the springs and wires of the rural panopticon. The public house, the GP surgery, the shop, the sheep fank (pen), the street, the church and the garage are all key points of exchange in rural Highland life. They are also spaces where observation takes place, and as such users of mental health services often shy away from these spaces, perceiving them as threatening in relation to gossip:

You do get feedback from friends who hear people talking about you in a bar. The bars are terrible places for gossip They are most likely to talk about it in NAME, which is a really close community bar. I mean there are very few what I would call outsiders or something. It's a place where a lot of gossip goes on. Fella behind the bar knows the whole community ... [Patrick, SL, 20/8/01]

Especially the local bar you know ... they love to have a go at anyone ... because there's something to talk about, something to discuss and laugh about. [group discussion, SL, 3/9/01]

There's gossip people in the park, and they stand at their gates gossiping about people. You walk past and you know their talking about you, which is something you never got in London. [Cameron, INV, 11/5/01]

Not only are certain spaces important here, but also certain individuals, usually long-standing community members recognised as being a nexus for local knowledge: 'There's a huge village gossip

¹⁴ *Coronation Street* is a long-running British TV 'soap opera' centred on a small community occupying a working-class inner-city in the North West of England.

¹⁵ To use Geertz's (1983) classic term to capture a sense of the densely-packed specificities of things known and talked about locally, the key bearers of local cultural transmission.

lives in the village', says Judith [INV, 26/9/01], *'and you see all those people, the doctor, the two receptionists going to her house, and you wonder what on earth they're talking about.'*

The existence and character of such gossip is all too familiar for our participants:

The first thing I noticed when I came to NAME was that people did gossip about each other One of the first things I remember was this girl moving into the housing estate and spreading a rumour that I had killed three children and then I went away on holiday. And a friend of mine told me that someone came to the house and said: (1) I was on drugs; (2) I was on probation; and it was so ridiculous ... [group discussion, ER, 23/11/01]

Interviewees accept that sometimes gossip might be supportive, born of genuine concern, a claim that we have elaborated elsewhere as a potentially positive caring resources in these localities (Philo et al., 2002a), but often it can descend into the 'bitchiness' and 'nastiness' experienced by the above individual. Much of this gossip is seen as malicious and might increase the risk of rejection by other community members: *'Some people in this village delight in other's misfortune. It never ceases to amaze me'* [Natasha, NWS, 17/7/01]; *'The gossip's dreadful ... you worry that somebody's going to say something to somebody else and its not going to be the right thing you know'* [Lisa, NWS, 11/7/01]; *'Everybody was acknowledging it and talking about it. And they did treat me different, so it became worse once everybody knew'* [Julia, SL, 17/9/01]. Gossip commonly involves embellishment of situations, symptoms and behaviours: *'It would spread like wildfire. And there's arms and legs on it'* [Lorraine, NWS, 17/7/01].

For someone with an addiction issue in a rural area, concealment from gossip can be extremely hard (Valentine et al., 2008¹⁶):

That's the problem, it doesn't matter where you are, I get caught; it doesn't matter what I do, somebody sees me! We were in PLACE one night and I thought, nobody is going to see me over here, [but] got back and 'You were drinking in PLACE yesterday'. It was dark! Somebody had seen me! [Ralph, SL, 18/9/01]

Not only was Ralph 'seen', he was the subject of gossip as somebody elected to talk about what had been seen to another, possibly directly to one of Ralph's loved ones or maybe via intermediaries. Much the same happened to Deborah [NWS, 23/7/01], who recalls one Saturday going to *'the wee shop over the hill, which happened to be a licensed grocer ... I wasn't 5 min in the shop when my brother came to offer me a lift home.'* When the interviewee asked Deborah whether she thought *'somebody had phoned up?'*, unsurprisingly her response was: *'Oh yes, obviously, 'oh, she's going to the shop!'* In both cases, the 'Chinese whispers' reached their homes near-instantaneously, potentially with an honest motive – concerns about how their drinking might exacerbate fragile mental health – and not necessarily over-distorting the truth, but still in a fashion disconcerting for them.

4.4. 'You know who is unwell anyway'

The implications of intimate local knowledge gained through the visibility of daily social routines are particularly important for people with mental health problems. Accessing and receiving different forms of healthcare, living through different phases of illness, and managing symptoms while concealing mental health

problems from others are all made difficult by the webs of surveillance and circuits of gossip criss-crossing rural places. Local knowledge of an individual's health status is finely tuned – *'Because everybody knows everybody else; if you did go to the doctor to say you had a problem, it would be round the community in no time at all'* [Phillip, SL, 9/8/01] – in part simply from noting the comings and goings of people associated with community health centres. As Darren [NWS, 18/7/01] glosses:

You know who is unwell anyway, because if you were along at the surgery and someone would say to you, 'how are you doing? I saw you popped into the surgery the other day', and [they] d probably ask me who else was there.

The common perception that visits to the General Practitioner (GP) or visits from the Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) will be noted and discussed by other community members means that some users have *not* sought help immediately, precisely because of fears about being spotted doing so. In the field, the research team was struck by the acute awareness of cars used by travelling mental health service providers, visible material forms of disclosure about someone's mental health problems: *'To think that people round about would see [the CPN], would see that car, would see where she was and would ... draw conclusions about what she was doing there'* [Lisa, NWS, 11/7/01]; *'The trick is you watch for the cars people have got, that's what I do, I know all the cars the social workers have got, every one of them. Watch for these cars!'* [Ralph, SL, 18/9/01].

Being seen to access services is clearly a risk for people not wishing to disclose their mental ill-health to the rest of the community. Access to services can risk gossip, as Paula [NWS, 14/7/01] stresses: *'there is a little bit of 'so and so seen a psychiatrist' and it's like 'oh so and so has seen a psychiatrist' [incredulous whisper]'*. The absence of community members through periods of hospitalisation is a highly visible happening, and inevitably the subject of gossip:

Like everyone here knows about it, they don't know the details or anything but they knew I was away in hospital ... When I went into hospital, I know people were talking about me and that ... I was hearing it on the grapevine, like ... people have been saying this about you and that about you. [Rebecca, SL, 16/9/01]

4.5. 'It's like you have to put up a front'

For many if not all of our participants, there is a desire to keep their mental ill-health secret, to avoid discussing it openly with other community members. This can partly be explained by cultures of resilience and silence that are said to characterise Highland social landscapes, contributing to a 'repression' of emotional expressiveness (Parr et al., 2005), but in part too it relates to the perceived consequences of widespread local knowledge about an individual's mental health status. Being the subject of gossip holds the terrifying potential of being stigmatised as an unworthy, suspect member of the community, from which might flow all sorts of exclusions from everyday social activities: *'and I think that's what people are frightened of, the stigma'* [Phillip, SL, 9/8/01]. While some participants report experiences of extreme social exclusion, partly as a result of what follows from stigmatisation through gossip (Philo et al., 2002b, 2004), also salient are the micro-spatial strategies deployed by other participants precisely to evade detection: to wriggle under or around the gazes of the rural panopticon. As Charmaine [ER, 22/11/01] reveals, *'I take all the short cuts to Somerfield and get my shopping and take all the short cuts back home so I don't have to meet anyone'*. Particularly if somebody is actively experiencing illness, sensing that their attempts at appearing mentally well might not be robust enough on a given day, such

¹⁶ Valentine et al. (2008, footnote 2) do discuss 'the Panopticon' in relation to how individuals may self-police their drink habits in rural areas.

strategies may be consciously called into play.

As well as delaying or even never attempting to access services for their mental health problems, individuals endeavoured to maintain appearances, to keep up with normal time-space routines, even as they recognised the difficulties of doing so in a small anonymity-free locale: *'It's not so easy to just hide away in somewhere like Alness, in your house. People tend to know each other a lot more so you are forced to get out the house a lot more'* [Leah, ER, 4/12/01]. Leah feels compelled to be out and about, which may have been detrimental to her condition, while others speak similarly: *'[You] just try to behave normally ... [you] try to carry on through the daily routine'* [Julia, SL, 17/9/01]; *'I've got to act normal ... I can't show ... then people are going to back away again'* [Fred, NWS, 24/7/01]; *'It's like you have to ... not pretend, that's not the right word, but it's the only word I can think of ... put up a front'* [Judith, INV, 26/8/01]. Putting up a 'front' resonates with Goffman's (1959) famous claims about 'fronts' (and 'front regions') in 'the performance of everyday life', the implication being that individuals strive to conceal from view the 'back' (and 'back regions') – precisely the spaces that the rural panopticon, and indeed all Panopticons, strive to expose. For a few participants, likely those who had experienced compulsory detention ('sectioning'), everything is seemingly at stake in getting these strategies right: *'If you make one mistake and you are mentally ill, you get locked up. You've got to be careful, really careful ... you've got to be really careful'* [Paul, SL, 10/9/01; original emphasis].

4.6. 'Keep the negative feelings to yourself'

What the above evidence underscores is the self-disciplining that individuals may enact in order to 'pass' as normal – here to perform sanity, almost irrespective of the churning distresses inside – and hence to achieve precisely that trick at the heart of Bentham's Panopticon: namely, to convert the 'external eye' of inspection (in the rural panopticon, multiple eyes) into the 'internal eye' of self-command. As Jessica [NWS, 18/7/01] articulates, *'I'm keeping with the rules'*, communicating a stark sense of self-policing with reference to the unspoken local 'rules', not least, in our study, rules about the non-display of emotional vulnerability (Parr et al., 2005).¹⁷ A problem is the dissonance then arising between a person's interior upsets and what they feel able to display on the exterior, a difficulty hardly confined to countryside contexts but intensified here for all the reasons – the dynamics of the rural panopticon – already explored. Hence:

... you tend to sort of keep a lot of the negative feelings to yourself, you know, because you think, well, I can't go down the street the day and go, like, I feel like crap, I feel like greetin' [crying], I feel like going up the road and just doing myself in. Because if you said that to them, they would just run in the other direction, you know. So it's not worth saying. [Siobhan, NWS, 5/7/01]

I think it was trying to find a face for the outside ... I was afraid of showing my emotions ... I didn't want to be going down the High Street and I'm in tears, I didn't want people saying 'poor Karen'. I didn't want people feeling sorry for me. It was myself I was frightened of, how I was going to react. I didn't want to lose the place really. [Karen, ER 6/11/01]

Not wishing 'to lose the place' is a telling notion: it is about Karen not wanting her mental ill-health to overwhelm her, but it is also inextricably bound into her determination not to be seen 'losing it'

in this 'place', the High Street in her village.

While an extension of our principal claims for this paper, it can be added that such a bottling up of interior mental distress – such a stifling of odd conduct in social space; such a choking of emotionally-charged conversation – may itself occur at the cost of improvements in mental health. A metaphor of spatial constriction is used by Barry [SL, 18/9/01] to describe this state: *'It can get claustrophobic ... it is claustrophobic if you are worried about what you are doing'* [Barry, SL, 18/9/01]. Claustrophobic and paranoid fears also emerge in two other remarks:

The lack of anonymity and paranoia smothered me. It was a horrendous feeling to come out of hospital and start to build up again ... I value my anonymity, my privacy and I found that you cannot have that over there [NAME of island]. [Eve, INV, 30/5/01]

There are quite a lot of curtain twitchers in the area who make it their business to know what you are up to. That was something I had to fight hard against. When you're depressed and you're mind is down ... the least wee things is difficult to cope with. When you are feeling vulnerable, you start feeling that people are against you. [Susan, SL, 20/9/01]

Here the 'curtain twitchers', the arch-proponents of rural panopticism, are pinpointed as themselves a factor in worsening mental health.

5. Conclusion

Towards the close of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977: 293) dates 'the completion of the carceral system', the ostensible empirical focus of his book, to '22nd January, 1840, the date of the official opening of Mettray.' Mettray was a colony for delinquent boys located in the small village of Mettray north-west of Tours, France, occupying a decidedly rural location lending itself to agricultural labour by the boys. 'The attraction of Mettray lay primarily in its attempt to foster supposedly 'natural' social relations in a largely rural context,' remarks Driver (1990: 273), and, as such, it fitted with that Rousseau-ian 'purifying' drive for educational-correctional institutions discussed earlier. As is now acknowledged (eg. Elden, 2003; Philo, 2012), *Discipline and Punish* has too often been conceptually reduced to Bentham's Panopticon, as if all the tricks and traits of modern disciplinary power are to be found in the imaginary spaces of this ideal institution. Rather, Foucault specified at great length the proliferation of plans, exemplars and instances of many different institutions designed to exert surveillant power, chained to the inculcation of self-disciplining techniques, across the whole terrain of the social field. Many of these 'institutions' were indeed barely institutions: some, like Mettray, forsake external fences, and, while likely possessing some walled spaces, many were less exercises in architecture and more experiments in forms of social organisation channelled into, and enabled through, spatial expression. All of these 'institutions' were regarded by Foucault as vectors of a diffuse 'panopticism', with its multiple interweavings of surveillance, disciplining and space, which spiralled far beyond the clean lines of Bentham's Panopticon.¹⁸ Insofar as some critics identify a disconnect in Foucault's text between his emphases on the Panopticon and on Mettray, the rural colony, then Semple's detection of a rural-pastoral logic lingering in Bentham's Panopticon thinking – captured in the glint of Antiope's rustic 'glass palace' – provides at least some glue for a potential reconnection.

More than this, though, for it is clear from Foucault's discussion

¹⁷ There is a loosely psychoanalytic flavour to what we say about 'repression', in which guise we also echo classic studies of repression and mental ill-health in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. More generally on the emotional reserve of rural communities, see discussion in Philo et al. (2003a,b).

¹⁸ The different models of the prison and asylum mentioned earlier were, quite explicitly, taken by Foucault as *all* being instances of 'panopticism'.

of Mettray that he finds here constant inspection of everyone by everyone else, accompanied by a chatty insistence on tale-telling about wrong-doers. '[E]ach day 'justice' was meted out in the parlour' (Foucault, 1977: 294), with even minor infractions punished severely, not by blows but by isolation of individuals in their cells (arguably less copying the Panopticon, more in line with a monastic model of discipline). Based on a 'family' model in which older boys acted as 'heads or deputy-heads' over younger boys, the former 'practically never left [the latter's] side, observing them day and night; they constituted among them a network of permanent observation' (Foucault, 1977: 295). Since all boys would eventually grow into such positions of responsibility, all inmates were enlisted into this network, the upshot being a veritable forest of gazes spanning the whole body of boys, together with reporting and consequences, which rendered the overall space of Mettray a field of intersecting visibilities. While this account could be elaborated, the point should now be apparent: that Mettray, in its country seclusion, borrowing from pastoral-labouring traditions and creating a self-monitoring rural social world, has much in common with the rural panopticon as we have been deconstructing it above through our Highland study. These articulations of the Panopticon and the rural panopticon, of 'Panopticon Town' and the 'glass palace' in the countryside, have hopefully now been solidified, contributing a new perspective for both rural theory and social studies of rural geography.

Acknowledging the theme of the issue hosting this paper, it must also be remembered that Bentham intended his Panopticon to serve not just 'the bad', but also 'the mad' as well. Foucault too recognised the diversity of troublesome and troubled populations targeted by the institutions of panopticism, meaning the more-or-less closed spaces of 'the caceral archipelago' (Foucault, 1977: 297). In his earliest major work, *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1965; Philo, 2004, 2013), he had dealt with the institutionalisation of 'the mad', those with mental ill-health, a theme to which he later returned in his *Psychiatric Power* lectures (Foucault, 2006; Philo, 2007). Across these two offerings, he effectively casts into the *same* narrative the massive nineteenth-century state lunatic asylums – these spatial machines for controlling 'the mad' which he understood in part through the lens of Bentham's Panopticon¹⁹ – and *both* the small-scale, country-house asylum of the York Retreat and the dispersed rural asylum colony of Gheel, in Belgium. Both the Retreat and Gheel, despite different ages and genealogies, shared with Mettray an appeal to the 'natural' reforming-therapeutic features of the rural (Philo, 2004, Chaps. 6 and 7). Indeed, there would be warrant for suggesting that both of these facilities, alongside their countless variants and imitators,²⁰ held much in common with what Semple (1993: 304) found lurking in Bentham's Panopticon: namely, that appeal to a 'pastoral Arcadia' of small family groupings, united in honest field-based toil, here under the watchful eyes of family members, responsible attendants and even 'saner' patients.

Such scenarios could readily be discussed in terms of the rural panopticon, of course, in which regard we conclude that the rural panopticon impacting the mentally fragile participants in our Highland Scotland study – while of course not centrally orchestrated – still resounds to the echo of, and can be critically

illuminated by, earlier instances of enlisting the rural into *both* the Panopticon *and* panopticism. Given that an awareness of being watched, discussed and judged is clearly such a pervasive feature of how our Highland respondents perceive their own situation, we would argue that there is considerable analytical mileage to be derived from framing our study in terms of the rural panopticon. To do so is thereby also to usher in an alertness to matters of 'space, knowledge and power' (Crampton and Elden, 2007) integral to Foucauldian inquiries, calling them to do 'duty' for researchers on rural geography – and, specifically, rural disability – in a manner theoretically rich, historically aware and full of substantive nuance. The upshot is to pose new questions about who sees and who is seen, who judges and who is judged, how, why and (exactly) when and where, via what mechanisms and with what consequences, what becomes internalised as individuals self-monitor, self-control, conceal and deny, whether the panopticism in play is designed, organised or happenstance, and whether or not acts of resistance or subversion (can) occur. Addressing the intensely spatial attributes of the rural panopticon – as impressing on the vulnerable bodies and minds of many rural-dwellers, including those identified or self-identifying as 'disabled' – is hence claimed as an insightful way to re-picture rurality, rural geography and a geography of rural disability.

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¹⁹ Foucault was giving his *Psychiatric Power* lectures at much the same time that he was finishing the text of *Discipline and Punish*, and there is no doubt that the former saw him return to the history of 'madness' through the optic of disciplinary power, including his emerging thoughts about the Panopticon and panopticism (Philo, 2007, 2012).

²⁰ Various rural asylum colony experiments, akin to Gheel, appeared in France: see Jodelet (1991); and, for commentary on Jodelet's work, Philo, 2001a,b).

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